

H. ROSS PEROT SPURS A POLLING EXPERIMENT (UNINTENTIONALLY)

By David M. Wilber

On March 21 at 8:00 pm, 15 million viewers tuned in Ross Perot/United We Stand America's (UWSA) national "town meeting" on governmental reform. Sources at NBC reported modest success in ratings (Nielsen rating, 7.1) for Perot's half-hour broadcast, while on CBS during the same time block *60 Minutes* had a rating of 27.2.

In his presentation, Perot asked viewers to respond to seventeen questions. These were printed and inserted in the March 20-26 issue of TV Guide. As of May 1, 1.4 million persons had responded to the mail-in "survey." Some critics who poll professionally expressed concern with Perot's efforts. In a March 20 article in the *New York Times*, Harry O'Neil, president of the National Council on Public Polls, noted that Perot's respondents were entirely self-selected and unrepresentative; and he called the questions "loaded and biased." It needs to be remembered, though, that Perot-like "surveys" are often used by interest groups for fundraising, as a method of generating comprehensive mailing lists, and as a form of communi-

cation to gain knowledge of those inclined to join.

Responding to the polling community's criticism, Perot asked major polling agencies to administer his questions to a national sample. He personally contacted George Gallup, Jr., chairman of the Gallup organization and Humphrey Taylor, president and CEO of Louis Harris and Associates. Both declined due to long-standing policies of not doing surveys for political figures. Finally, Ross Perot contacted Gordon Black, president of the Gordon Black Corporation. After reviewing the questions, Black rejected Perot's offer, saying the questions were biased. Later, Perot commissioned Black to reframe the questions and put them to a national sample. Black did the survey March 21-22.

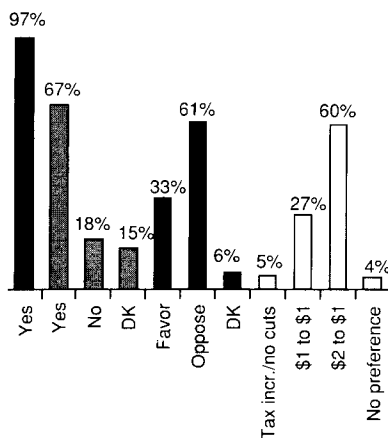
In a phone interview Black was asked why he agreed to work with UWSA. He said that many special interest groups sponsor surveys. UWSA was looking to obtain information bearing on their aims and goals and should be treated like similarly situated groups.

Shortly before Black's survey was to begin, *Time* and CNN co-sponsored a survey which Yankelovich Partners conducted to measure public opinion on Perot's initiatives. *Time/CNN* asked Perot's questions in their original form to one-half of a split sample, and put what they considered more balanced versions to the other half. The results of this interesting experiment are shown below. We see the answers to four of Perot's questions as given by his mail-in respondents; those given these questions as Perot framed them, but from a national sample (*Time/CNN/Yankelovich*); responses to reframed versions of the questions from a national sample (*Time/CNN/Yankelovich*); and lastly, responses to another reframing of the questions and another national sample (Black).

David M. Wilber is senior analyst/writer, the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut

THE PEROT EXPERIMENT

BIGGER SPENDING CUTS?



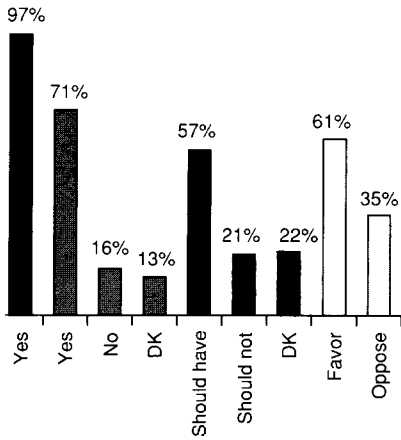
Perot Question/Mail-In Sample: Do you believe that for every dollar of tax increase there should be two dollars in spending cuts with the savings earmarked for deficit and debt reduction?

Perot Question/Yankelovich Sample:

Yankelovich Question/Yankelovich Sample: Would you favor or oppose a proposal to cut spending by two dollars for every dollar in new taxes, with the savings earmarked for deficit reduction, even if that meant cuts in domestic programs like Medicare and education?

Black's Redo of Perot Question/Black Sample: Which of the following deficit reduction approaches would you prefer a) a program that relies entirely on tax increases, with no spending cuts, b) a program that requires \$1 of spending cuts for every \$1 of tax increases, c) or, a program that requires at least \$2 of more spending cuts for every \$1 of tax increases.

LINE ITEM VETO?

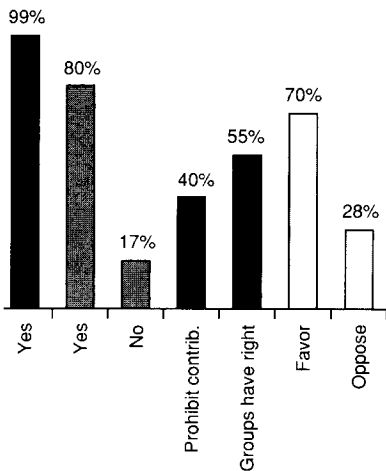


Perot Question/Mail-In Sample: Should the President have the Line Item Veto to eliminate waste?

Perot Question/Yankelovich Sample:

Yankelovich Question/Yankelovich Sample: Should the President have the Line Item Veto, or not?

Black's Redo of Perot Question/Black Sample: Do you favor or oppose giving the President the Line Item Veto?



SHUT-OUT SPECIAL INTERESTS?

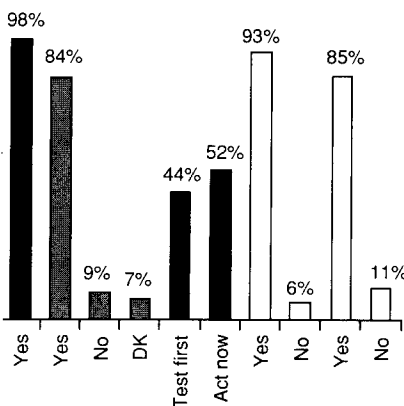
Perot Question/Mail-In Sample: Should laws be passed to eliminate all possibilities of special interests giving huge sums of money to candidates?

Perot Question/Yankelovich Sample:

Yankelovich Question/Yankelovich Sample: Should laws be passed to prohibit interest groups from contributing to campaigns, or do groups have a right to contribute to the candidate they support?

Black's Redo of Perot Question/Black Sample: ...please tell me whether you favor or oppose the proposal...The passage of new laws that would eliminate all possibility of special interests giving large sums of money to candidates.

TEST AND CONSULT ON HEALTH CARE REFORM?



Perot Question/Mail-In Sample: Should major new programs such as health care reform be first presented to the American people in detail, and then tested in pilot programs to prove their cost effectiveness before they are implemented nationwide?

Perot Question/Yankelovich Sample:

Yankelovich Question/Yankelovich Sample: Should major new programs such as health care reform be first tested in pilot programs to prove their cost effectiveness, or should we act now to do something about problems like health care as soon as possible?

Black's Redo of Perot Question/Black Sample: If the President and Congress propose major new programs such as health care reform, should the programs first be presented to the American people in full detail before they are implemented nationwide?

Should these programs be tested in pilot programs to prove their effectiveness before they are implemented nationwide?

Note: Responses of "don't know" which comprise less than 5% of the response category are not presented. The mail-in petition done by Perot/UWSA contained 17 items but for reasons of space only four items are presented.

Source: These data are taken from a mail-in petition conducted by United We Stand America (UWSA), March 20-26, 1993 and surveys by Yankelovich Partners for *Time/CNN*, March 18, 1993 and the Gordon Black Corporation for UWSA, March 21-22, 1993.